DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 313 100 PS 018 132

AUTHOR Howard, Katrena C.
TITLE Early Prevention and Intervention Programs for At-Risk Students.
PUB DATE 87
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *County School Districts; *Early Intervention; Elementary Secondary Education; *High Risk Students; *Improvement Programs; *Prevention; *Student Improvement
IDENTIFIERS *Georgia (DeKalb County)

ABSTRACT

This document describes programs implemented in the DeKalb County (Georgia) school system that attempt to remediate at-risk status and prevent students from becoming at-risk. DeKalb's programs focus on improved academics and social and emotional well-being. The programs target children as young as 4 years of age, but continue through elementary and secondary schools. Programs include: (1) a magnet program for 4-year-olds; (2) a Developmental First Grade; (3) the elementary Remedial Education Program for reading; (4) a Lead Teacher for Student Services; (5) Adopt-A-School; and (6) the Homework Helpline. These programs are provided in addition to traditional remedial programs, such as Chapter 1 and other reading and mathematics programs that are effective for many students. It is concluded that the DeKalb County School System is making concerted efforts to prevent students from becoming susceptible to the maladies that often result from school failure. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED313100

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

EARLY PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PROGRAMS FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

Katrena C. Howard

DeKalb County School System

Department of Research and Evaluation

Clarkston, Georgia

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Katrena C. Howard

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 018132

Robert R. Freeman, Superintendent
Edward L. Bouie, Sr., Associate Superintendent for Program Development and Staff Assessment
Null A. Tucker, Director, Research and Evaluation

EARLY PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PROGRAMS FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

Georgia's DeKalb County School system, the largest in the state with over 71,000 students, proudly boasts a low percentage of students dropping out of school. Only 2.2 percent of the system's students in grades eight through twelve dropped out in 1986-87. DeKalb County is located near Atlanta and has a diverse population; the socioeconomic status of the population ranges from lower middle class to affluent. Some areas of the county have a history of stability. Other areas have recently stabalized after a whirlwind racial transition, and still others are transient.

For several years the system has provided numerous programs for at-risk students as well as for those who have dropped out of school. There have been remedial programs available for elementary students who have special needs, especially in the areas of reading and math. Many of the programs, however, have been limited to students at the secondary level. Unfortunately, by the time a student reaches high school, the problems are severe and difficult to remediate. It appears that DeKalb's efforts to prevent students from dropping out have been effective, but not effective enough. School system personnel believe that the percentage of dropouts can be lowered by preventing many of

the problems that we know cause students to do poorly in school and eventually drop out. Therefore, in recent years DeKalb school personnel have extended their focus to include primary and elementary grade students.

Several reasons exist for emphasizing prevention and intervention in the early years. Researchers at the Center for Reseach on Elementary and Middle Schools (CREMS, December, 1987) noted that "a common thread winds its way through each [cause for the dropout problem] -- poor academic performance in school usually from the early years onward" (p.1). Similary, personnel in the United States Department of Education wrote, "Poor academic performance is the single best predictor of who drops out " (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1987, p. 3). Logically then, these sources emphasized the need for effective programs that improve the academic performance of at-risk students. Furthermore, preschool and early childhood programs head the Urban Superintendents' list of ways to help at-risk youngsters succeed (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1987). "Intervene early -- monitor academic and social progress of children carefully and early -- and provide special help before years of academic failure have eroded a youngster's self-esteem and left him or her woefully behind in school" (p.7). Thus, the key to dropout prevention may be to provide "... early intervention programs during the formative years" (p.16). Furthermore, " building self- confidence and parent support

are more attainable goals during the preschool years" (p.18).

Obviously then, it is imperative to provide programs for the at-risk student during the preschool and primary years. Karweit (CREMS, 1987) found, however, that the progress made by at-risk students in early school programs often washed out in later elementary grades. Therefore, programs should be implemented throughout the elementary grades in order to maintain progress and to continue to increase learning.

The programs that have been implemented in the DeKalb School System attempt to prevent students from becoming at-risk. If there are indications that students are becoming at-risk, corrective measures are taken to intervene before the problem becomes irreparable. The programs described below focus on improving academics as well as on establishing the student's social and emotional well-being. Furthermore, programs target students as early as four years old and continue through elementary and even high school. Although some programs were implemented specifically to help the at-risk student, other programs initially designed for all students have proven most beneficial for the at-risk student.

Magnet Program for Four Year Olds

A magnet program for four year olds was implemented just this past year. The purpose of the full-day program

was to provide disadvantaged youngsters with an opportunity to experience school culture. Many of the students were unfamiliar with books as well as other socialization skills that are necessary prerequisites for success in school. In the pilot program, twenty children were divided into two classes, each class having a teacher and a paraprofessional. The curriculum focused on providing the students with positive social and emotional experiences to enable them to have a good start in school. Though it is too soon to have any substantial data, the teachers reported that the youngsters were eager to learn, were well-behaved, and mastered the objectives that were established at the outset of the program.

Developmental First Grade

In the state of Georgia, state legislators mandated that all kindergarten children must score within a certain range on the California Achievement Test for promotion to first grade. Although the rigidity of that mandate has been rescinded and other factors can also be considered for promotion, the expectations for children entering first grade are high. Only 6% of DeKalb's students failed to make a passing score, but many more students are not ready for the structure and demands of first grade. In order to ensure that these students will be successful, DeKalb has implemented a Developmental First Grade to meet the needs of those students. In this program, students are provided with

additional readiness activities to broaden their experiences and to prepare them for first grade.

Elementary Remedial Education Program for Reading

The elementary Remedial Education Program for reading is a provision of Georgia's Quality Basic Education Act with the intent of bringing all public school children up to grade level in reading. The goal of this program is to support the mastery of essential competencies in reading by providing intense, individualized basic instruction. The state-funded program targets students in grades two through five who scored at or below the twenty-fifth percentile, or its equivalent, on the reading portion of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. The DeKalb School System provides additional funds to accomodate elementary students who scored six months or more below grade level in reading but rated above the twenty-fifth percentile. There are 256 remedial education program teachers and reading specialists assisted by fifty-three reading paraprofessionals who instruct 3,520 state-funded students and 2,356 county-funded students in seventy-four elementary schools. Students are organized into instructional groups of no more than twelve with a single teacher or no more than seventeen with a teacher and a paraprofessional. The progress of the students is monitored closely by staff from the system's Reading Center and the individual school's leadership team.

Lead Teacher for Student Services

A Lead Teacher for Student Services (LTSS) has been added to the faculties of 48 elementary schools. The LTSS is responsible for serving as a resource and support person in several different areas related specifically to preventing students from becoming at-risk. The LTSS serves as chair or co-chair of the school's Educational Management Team (EMT). This committee makes decisions about students who have been referred by the classroom teacher. By serving on this committee, the LTSS is cognizant of those students who are having difficulties with academics, attendance, or behavior. The LTSS works closely with the teachers of referred students to provide alternative teaching strategies or methods that would help the student become successful in the classroom.

Often the LTSS spends time with students in a one-to-one situation. To help the LTSS be effective in dealing with students' problems, the school system has provided special training. One such training session was a two-week "Prevention Convention" that provided information that would help in identifying and dealing with at-risk students. In addition, monthly training sessions are provided for the LTSS. The information learned at these training sessions is disseminated to all elementary teachers to increase their abilities to help at-risk students. Because a student's teacher is often the first person to

realize that there is a problem, it is essential that the classroom teacher knows what kinds of things to look for in order to intervene early.

In addition to working with individual students and teachers, the LTSS provides whole class instruction on skills to prevent problems from ever occuring. The LTSS teaches upper elementary students skills in the following areas: problem-solving techniques, self-concept development, decision-making, and other areas that deal with the emotional upheavels of growing up.

Because it is important to involve parents in their children's educational process, the LTSS also provides classes for parents. These classes are designed to help parents develop better parenting skills. Most of the information is disseminated in small groups on relevant topics such as discipline and helping with homework.

In schools where LTSS services are available to at-risk students and their teachers, standardized and criterion-referenced test scores have increased as has student attendance. There has also been a reduction in referrals to administrators for disciplinary problems. During the coming year, the program will be implemented in fifteen more schools. In addition to the responsilities discussed previously, the LTSS will coordinate a project that will involve teacher-to-student and student-to-student mentoring.

Adopt-a-School *

The Adopt-A -School program has been more successful than ever envisioned. This is a partnership program where local business, civic, and other professional groups have "adopted" a particular school. Roles of the various adopters vary, although emphasis is placed on involving people from the community, especially the business community, to be personally and actively involved in the educational process. Partners are matched to schools depending on the needs and desires of the partners as well as the schools. Although all students in the system benefit, some adopters have specifically requested to work with at-risk students and/or offer incentives targeted for them. These adopters provide programs and services particularly valuable for meeting the needs of at-risk students.

An organization of black business women stressed that they wanted to make a difference in the lives of children and, therefore, requested to work with low-achieving students. In their adopted elementary school, members tutor students every Tuesday and Thursday. In addition, they regularly recognize student achievement in the areas of academics and attendance by providing certificates and other awards. These women stress the value of education and are positive role models for these students.

* There are photographs available depicting students and their adopters. Permission from students' parents must be obtained, however, before releasing the pictures for publication.

A large corporation has also shown great support for at-risk students in an elementary school. Twenty-six students who had experienced attendance problems were challenged to improve their attendance by a specified percentage. Students who accomplished this goal were rewarded with a trip to an Atlanta Braves game.

Employees from another large corporation sponsored a latch key program in their adopted elementary school because a large number of students were "latch key children." Third and fourth graders were prepared for being at home alone after school and during the summer.

In another school, a large percentage of students failed the state's basic skills test for third graders. Several employees from the adopting company provided regular tutoring for the students. After retaking the test, all the students passed.

In some schools where student achievement is low, adopters recognized and awarded students who made progress. This is particularly significant for the at-risk student who may be unable to make the traditional honor rolls yet.

Formal efforts are being made to quantify the resources of time, materials, and money that have been made available to the schools through the Adopt-A- School program. Current estimates indicate that over 8,000 volunteers have provided services such as tutoring, consulting, presenting informational programs, providing exhibits, and assisting with school projects. The benefits to the students are

apparent in their attitudes and the pride they exhibit when an adopter is present. A comment from one youngster typifies students' reactions to the Adopt-A-School program, "Our school never looked so good!"

Homework Helpline

The Homework Helpline is available to students in kindergarten through twelfth grade who need assistance with their homework. The service is available between 5 p.m. and 8 p.m. Monday through Thursday. A team of seven teachers, one counselor, and two senior high students assist with calls each evening. In the past year, approximately 11,000 phone calls were fielded by certified teachers who responded to calls not only from students but from parents. The majority of calls came from upper elementary students who needed help primarily in language arts and mathematics. Most of the calls from junior and senior high students concerned questions about mathematics. Counselors talk with parents and students about academic scheduling and programs, alternative educational opportunitiess for dropouts, teen pregnancies, suicide threats, and other problems that may interfere with learning.

Discussion and Summary

The programs discussed above are in addition to traditional remedial programs such as Chapter 1 and other reading and math programs that have been and continue to be

effective for many students. Yet some students still "fall through the cracks" to become prime candidates for dropping out. Therefore, it is important to offer as many strategies as possible to help potential at-risk students.

DeKalb County School System is making concerted efforts to prevent students from becoming susceptable to delinquency, substance abuse, dropping out, and other maladies often resulting from school failure. An increased emphasis on teaching skills, school improvement plans based on the most current data available, a strong curriculum, ever-improving school leadership, and now a conscious effort to go beyond traditional remedial programs in the preschool and early grades all seem to impact positively on at-risk students. Instead of having students begin school at a disadvantage and remain at a disadvantage, we have intervened as early as age four to narrow the gap and to help ensure that all students have every opportunity to experience success.

References

CREMS, Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools, "Research Identifies Effective Programs for Students At Risk of School Failure." The Johns Hopkins University (December 1987): 1-11.

U.S. Department of Education. Office of Educational Research and Improvement. 1987. "Dealing with Dropouts: The Urban Superintendents' Call to Action." Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office.